

Past Echoes

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Summary: Sequel to Follow the Lights Home. Chris and his two adopted sons, Buck and Vin, are becoming a family. Some ghosts of the past need to be laid to rest in order for them to continue growing together. But on their trip to do so other ghosts are raised.

1. Of Love and Fish Tales

****Disclaimer: Nope they still won't give me any cowboys.****

****Past Echoes****

****Chapter 1****

****Of Love and Fish Tales****

****"Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin."****

****• Mother Teresa****

Vin gripped the cliff side hard with one hand and held tightly to the metal box with the other. Trying to find better purchase with his feet he hissed as the throbbing in his foot intensified. Through the haze he heard someone call his name. He looked, with pain filled blue eyes, up at Buck.

"Vin you need to let it go and grab my hand," Buck instructed urgently reaching down his arm.

_Vin looked down at the box then looked back up at his brother again. He wondered to himself how it had all gone so wrong. How had a simple retrieval of a box turn into such a mess? He wished he could turn back time and never returned to this place; they should have stayed home at the ranch. It was all his fault. His new family's trouble had

only started just a couple days before..._

"Dad let me name it," Vin explained quietly without taking his eyes away from the passing dark landscape.

"Why'd you name it the Painted Hills?" Chris asked from the driver's seat.

"There was Indian drawings," The boy drawled shyly, "and at sunset it looked like God was up in heaven finger painting the hills."

"Sounds pretty," Chris smiled through the rearview mirror at the blond boy, before glancing over at the sleeping brunet in the passenger seat.

The truck fell into a sleepy silence as they traveled closer to their destination. This wasn't Chris' first choice for their first family road trip together; to drive through the night to a neighboring state to spend the first week of summer vacation with his boys to lay some ghosts to rest. "We should get there just before noon. Do you think you can find the spot you camped?" This trip was for Vin, the choice lied with him about how he wanted to do this. The local LEOs would be on standby just in case. The federal agents who had handled Vin's father's case had assured Chris that the man Joe would have hightailed it out of the country. They had wanted to retrieve the information from the hills but Vin wasn't responding well at that point. Chris didn't want to push Vin on the subject; instead he let the boy process everything in his own time. The information had kept thus long it could wait till Vin was ready. Vin had come to Chris one night a few weeks before school let out for the summer. Vin said he could find it but he needed to be there to do so. Chris protested at first; the lurking Joe always in the back of his mind no matter how many reassurances he got from the feds. Vin quietly listened before pleading to go back and clear his dad's name. Chris could not deny him that. Two weeks of planning, packing and coordinating and they were off to the Painted Hills.

Vin was quiet for so long that Chris figured he fell asleep, but eventually he answered, "I remember where to find it"

Chris' estimate proved correct. They pulled into the small summer community of Sage Valley Mountain just before lunchtime. Parking next to the Sage Valley Caf  Chris and the boys stepped out, stretching out aches of the long travel. Ordering lunch they sat in the hunting themed restaurant. As they sat in a booth waiting to place their orders, the boys' heads were in constant motion.

"Look at that bear Vin," Buck pointed towards the large full body grizzly bear mount.

Vin's eyes grew wide in amazement before they turned pleadingly towards Chris.

Chris took a long moment to contemplate teasingly then gave them permission, "Go look at it but only look. It's not ours so leave it alone. And if you're not back to order; I'm getting you both salad," he laughed at their stricken looks as they hurried to the bear with an occasional glance back.

Chris watched for a moment before the waitress arrived. He expected

to hear the boys run up any moment, but was surprised when loud singing filled the café. Turning away from the smiling waitress he saw the boys looking up at a deer head mount; a moving singing deer head.

"It looks and sounds just like you," Vin gasped out between laughs, "Even got's your name Bucky."

Buck shook his head before grabbing Vin in a headlock. Their loud shenanigans continued attracting the attention of the other diners. Most laughed but a few looked disgusted. Chris stood up and let out a piercing whistle. The café fell silent and it seemed to gain a couple more deer as the boys stood still, like they were caught in the headlights of a car. The mechanical mount had fallen silent and the restaurant went back eating with the occasional chuckle heard. Chris eyed the boys a second before retaking his seat. They shuffled over with lowered heads.

"It was that stupid deer's fault," Buck grumbled.

"Bucky," Vin whispered the deer's name helpfully.

"I'm sorry boys. Bucky is motion sensed. How about an ice cream cone on the house?" The waitress apologized with a small smile. Both boys' heads lifted and hopeful eyes once again hit Chris.

"Thank Brooke," Chris ordered the boys after subtly read her tag, "and behave."

They quickly gave their orders, no one asked for salad, and settled into wait. They fell into a slightly awkward silence, as the atmosphere darkened as their reason for being in Sage Valley came again to their minds. Buck looked back towards the mounts and started chuckling. Both the blondes' heads lifted in suspicion.

"Remember when Adam met Mr. Fish?" Buck asked between chuckles.

Vin observed with amazement as a smile broke over Chris' face. Then Chris was laughing along with Buck; Vin watched silently.

"I don't think Sarah ever found all those goldfish," Chris added as Brooke brought their plates. Buck thanked their waitress with a big flirtatious smile. The young woman smiled back telling him what a nice boy he was; leaving behind a slightly crestfallen Buck. They settled into eating with an occasional laugh mostly at Buck's expense; who soon joined in goodnaturedly. Once finished they headed to the campgrounds with the promised ice cream in hand. Chris left the boys by the truck in the parking lot to eat their cones and went to talk to the forest rangers in the small wood station building.

"Buck whose Mr. Fish?" Vin asked quietly looking into the trees.

Buck looked over before mentally kicking himself for leaving Vin out. Vowing to do better he answered, "Mr. Fish was one of those singing fish. Chris had gotten it from his grandpa when he was little. One day we found it in the attic. Adam loved it." He paused to laugh again before continuing, "Well Adam thought all fish could sing, so he tried to make a goldfish choir."

"He didn't?" Vin gasped before giggling.

"Yep he did. We came into the room to find an empty tank. The goldfish choir scattered all over," Both boys dissolved into laughter.

When Chris returned the boys were in high spirits. The truck was unloaded with the supplies split between their backpacks. With one last reassurance Chris clasped both boys' shoulders. They started up the trail with Vin leading the way. Walking the path that Vin and his dad had hiked up almost two years previous.

2. Lost and Finding

****A/N** Here it is finally, enjoy. Just for those wondering neither boy has had their birthday since the last story (most of which took place about nine months before this one) so Buck is almost fourteen and Vin is nearly nine.******

****Past Echoes****

****Chapter 2****

****Lost and Finding****

****"The past is never where you think you left it."****

****• Katherine Anne Porter****

"I can't find it," the devastation in the little boy's voice was heartbreaking.

Buck and Chris stopped next to their upset companion, before Chris asked, "What's the matter Vin?"

"It looks different," Vin confessed with a sniffle, "We came in fall so the trees weren't so thick."

Buck looked around them, "Did you turn off the trail?"

Vin nodded miserably. Buck pulled him close as Chris removed his pack and scouted the area up ahead.

The boys sat down against a large tree falling into an uncomfortable silence. Vin kept darting his eyes around the area; while he worried his lower lip with his teeth.

"You know when I first came to live at the ranch, I ran away and got lost," Buck looked up at the sky as he finally broke the silence, "I just wanted my mom."

"Why'd ya leave?" Vin asked scooting closer; touching shoulders with his new brother in comfort knowing the reason for Buck living with his uncle and the ultimate fate of the older boy's mother. The same as his own beloved mom. His eyes filled with empathy as they met Buck's own sad blue eyes.

Buck sighed sadly running a hand through his dark hair, "I knew my

mom was gone but I guess I thought if I went back to Vegas I could find her."

"How'd ya find yer way?" Vin asked around the lump in his throat; feeling the loss of his own parents as well.

Buck chuckled softly putting an arm around Vin and pulling him close, "Chris saved me."

"Yeah he's good at that," Vin agreed melting into his big brother's embrace.

Chris came back down the trail to find the boys sitting close together in a thoughtful silence.

"Did you break him Vin?" Chris questioned with a gentle smile.

Both boys whipped their heads up in alarm startled by his sudden reappearance.

"Hey I can be quiet sometimes you know," Buck protested while Vin giggled at the other boy's expense.

"Only when you're planning something that get's you in trouble" Chris shot back as he gathered up his pack; then grabbed a drink from his water bottle. The boys stood up and pulled on their own packs as well. Chris waved them over as he started back up the trail giving them his trail update as they hiked.

"It appears to keep going up steeply with thick foliage on both sides for quite a few miles. Even in fall and on foot I don't think you'd have to much leeway in going off road. So I think we still have a ways to go." Chris reasoned to the boys.

They continued hiking for some time before the trees began to thin. Vin kept swiveling his head around blue eyes scanning the new terrain. With each step the trail became more and more familiar and Vin stated to become more animated almost shaking in anticipation.

"I think this is it," Vin finally exclaimed excitedly, "This Is It!"

He began racing up the rocky trail, "Wait Vin," Chris called out a warning to late. Vin stumbled tripping over a loose rock and went down hard with a yelp. Sliding down with a mini avalanche of rocks he came to a stop down the trail. Chris and Buck rushed to his side more carefully but full of concern.

Vin winced as Chris inspected his leg and ankle, as well as the myriad of bruises. Buck rummaged through the bag for their fully stocked first aid kit, that Nathan had made sure they packed.

"How you doing there, Surefoot?" Buck asked teasingly with an underlying hint of worry in his voice, as he handed the kit over to Chris. Vin didn't answer; he just gritted his teeth against the pain.

Chris glanced up from the bag to find pain lines surrounding the dull blue eyes.

"Did you know that Nathan saved me when we were in the Army?" Chris asked conversationally trying to distract Vin.

Vin bit his lip before shaking his head lightly. Curiosity started to fill his eyes replacing some of the pain.

"Well I was outside a town that had just been attacked. Most of my unit was down," some old pain filled Chris' eyes before he continued; "I was hurt; I couldn't walk. All of the sudden a medic was crouched by my side."

"Uncle Nathan," Vin guessed. Both Vin and then Buck had started calling Chris' team by Uncle; especially after Buck dropped the term for Chris after the adoption.

"Yep," Chris agreed tying the ankle securely.

"What happened next," Vin prompted through gritted teeth.

"Well I couldn't walk and there were hostiles shooting all around us. So Nathan just patched me up and threw me over his shoulder like a bag of potatoes," Chris helped the smiling Vin to a more comfortable position against a fallen log.

Buck who had heard the story before smirked from his place repacking the bags before adding, "At least it wasn't a bridal carry over the threshold." Chris tossed the roll of bandages at the cheeky boy's head. It bounced off leaving them all laughing despite the pain and problems they faced. They decided to camp in the clearing for the night. Buck and Chris worked together to carry their supplies, firewood and even Vin to their appointed campsite. Vin insisted he was fine the whole time setting up; he tried to get to his feet multiple times. Either of his adopted family would sit him back down with a gentle chastisement each time before going back to their previous tasks. Chris finally grew tired of Vin's antics and set him on kitchen duty; setting all the dinner makings in front of him. Once camp was set up and dinner eaten and cleaned up they settle in for their first night camping as a family.

As they slipped into their sleeping bags all three Larabees found comfort looking into the heavens. Each star shone brightly in inky blackness.

"What if I can't walk tomorrow?" Vin's worried voice whispered in the darkness.

"We'll see what tomorrow brings and figure it out," Chris promised feeling every muscle ache from the day's hiking.

"Kay," Vin answered with a yawn; feeling a little better.

Buck started belting out a campfire song; the others laughed and joined in. The sang as terribly as they could; trying to out do each other. After the song ended silence once again reigned over the clearing. One by one they slipped off to sleep hoping that the next day would be better.

End

file.